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George Mueller's Strategy for Showing God Simplicity of Faith, Sacred Scripture, and Satisfaction in God

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Topic: Biography

George Mueller was a native German (a Prussian). He was born in Kroppenstaedt on September 27, 1805 and lived almost the entire nineteenth century. He died March 10, 1898 at the age of 92. He saw the great awakening of 1859 which he said “led to the conversion of hundreds of thousands.”¹ He did follow up work for D. L. Moody,² preached for Charles Spurgeon,³ and inspired the missionary faith of Hudson Taylor.⁴

He spent most of his life in Bristol, England and pastored the same church there for over sixty-six years—a kind of independent, premillennial,⁵ Calvinistic⁶ Baptist⁷ church that celebrated the Lord's supper weekly⁸ and admitted non-baptized people into membership.⁹ If this sounds unconventional, that would be accurate. He was a maverick not only in his church life but in almost all the areas of his life. But his eccentricities were almost all large-hearted and directed outward for the good of others. A. T. Pierson, who wrote the biography that Mueller's son-in-law endorsed as authoritative,¹⁰ captured the focus of this big-hearted eccentricity when he said, George Mueller “devised large and liberal things for the Lord's cause.”¹¹

In 1834 (when he was 28) he founded The Scripture Knowledge Institute for Home and Abroad,¹² because he was disillusioned with the post-millennialism, the liberalism, and the worldly strategies (like going into debt¹³) of existing mission organizations.¹⁴ Five branches of this Institute developed: 1) Schools for children and adults to teach Bible knowledge, 2) Bible distribution, 3) missionary support, 4) tract and book distribution, and 5) “to board, clothe and Scripturally educate *destitute* children who have lost both parents by death.”¹⁵

The accomplishments of all five branches were significant,¹⁶ but the one he was known for around the world in his own lifetime, and still today, was the orphan ministry. He built five large orphan houses and cared for 10,024 orphans in his life. When he started in 1834 there were accommodations for 3,600 orphans in all of England and twice that many children under eight were in prison.¹⁷ One of the great effects of Mueller's ministry was to inspire others so that “fifty years after Mr. Mueller began his work, at least one

hundred thousand orphans were cared for in England alone.”¹⁸

He did all this while he was preaching three times a week from 1830 to 1898, at least 10,000 times.¹⁹ And when he turned 70 he fulfilled a life-long dream of missionary work for the next 17 years until he was 87. He traveled to 42 countries,²⁰ preaching on average of once a day,²¹ and addressing some three million people.²² He preached nine times here in Minneapolis in 1880 (nine years after the founding of Bethlehem Baptist Church).

From the end of his travels in 1892 (when he was 87) until his death in March of 1898 he preached in his church and worked for the Scripture Knowledge Institute. At age 92, not long before he died, he wrote, “I have been able, every day and all the day to work, and that with ease, as seventy years since.”²³ He led a prayer meeting at his church on the evening of Wednesday, March 9, 1898. The next day a cup of tea was taken to him at seven in the morning but no answer came to the knock on the door. He was found dead on the floor beside his bed. ²⁴

The funeral was held the following Monday in Bristol, where he had served for sixty-six years. “Tens of thousands of people reverently stood along the route of the simple procession; men left their workshops and offices, women left their elegant homes or humble kitchens, all seeking to pay a last token of respect.”²⁵ A thousand children gathered for a service at the Orphan House No. 3. They had now “for a second time lost a ‘father’.”²⁶

He had read his Bible from end to end almost 200 times.²⁷ He had prayed in millions of dollars (in today's currency²⁸) for the Orphans and never asked anyone directly for money. He never took a salary in the last 68 years of his ministry, but trusted God to put in people's hearts to send him what he needed. He never took out a loan or went into debt.²⁹ And neither he nor the orphans were ever hungry. The eccentric pastor and orphan-lover was gone.

He had been married twice: to Mary Groves when he was 25, and to Susannah Sangar when he was 66. Mary bore him four children. Two were stillborn. One son Elijah died when he was a year old. His daughter Lydia married James Wright who succeeded Mueller as the head of the Institute. But she died in 1890 at 57 years old. Five years later Mueller lost his second wife, just three years before he died. And so he outlived his family and was left alone with his Savior, his church, and two thousand children. He had been married to Mary for 39 years and to Susannah for 23 years. He preached Mary's funeral sermon when he was 64,³⁰ and he preached Susannah's funeral sermon when he was 90.³¹ It's what he said in the face of this loss and pain that gives us the key to his life.

Mary's Death and the Key to His Life

We have the full text of the message at Mary's funeral and we have his own recollections of this loss. To feel the force of what he says, we have to know that they loved each other deeply and enjoyed each other in the work they shared.

Were we happy? Verily we were. With every year our happiness increased more and more. I never saw my beloved wife at any time, when I met her unexpectedly anywhere in Bristol, without being

delighted so to do. I never met her even in the Orphan Houses, without my heart being delighted so to do. Day by day, as we met in our dressing room, at the Orphan Houses, to wash our hands before dinner and tea, I was delighted to meet her, and she was equally pleased to seeme. Thousands of times I told her—“My darling, I never saw you at any time, since you became my wife, without my being delighted to see you.”³²

Then came the diagnosis: “When I heard what Mr. Pritchard's judgment was, viz., that the malady was rheumatic fever, I naturally expected the worst. . . . My heart was nigh to be broken on account of the depth of my affection.”³³ The one who had seen God answer 10,000 prayers for the support of the orphan, this time did not get what he asked. Or did he?

Twenty minutes after four, Lord's Day, February 6, 1870, Mary died. “I fell on my knees and thanked God for her release, and for having taken her to Himself, and asked the Lord to help and support us.”³⁴ He recalled later how he strengthened himself during these hours. And here we see the key to his life.

The last portion of scripture which I read to my precious wife was this: “The Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Now, if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have received grace, we are partakers of grace, and to all such he will give glory also. I said to myself, with regard to the latter part, “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”—I am in myself a poor worthless sinner, but I have been saved by the blood of Christ; and I do not live in sin, I walk uprightly before God. Therefore, if it is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me [to have her]. And so my heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says.³⁵

Here is the cluster of unshakable convictions and experiences that are the key to this remarkable life. “I am in myself a poor worthless sinner.” “I have been saved by the blood of Christ.” “I do not live in sin.” God is sovereign over life and death. If it is good for her and for me, she will be restored again. If not she won't.” “My heart is at rest.” “I am satisfied with God.” All this comes from taking God at his word. There you see the innermost being of George Mueller and the key to his life. The word of God, revealing his sin, revealing his Savior, revealing God's sovereignty, revealing God's goodness, revealing God's promise, awakening his faith, satisfying his soul. “I was satisfied with God.”

The Gift of Faith vs. the Grace of Faith

So were his prayers for Mary answered? To understand how Mueller himself would answer this question, we have to see the way he distinguished between the extraordinary *gift* of faith and the more ordinary *grace* of faith. He constantly insisted that he did *not* have the gift of faith when people put him on a pedestal just because he would pray for his own needs and the needs of the orphans, and the money would arrive in remarkable ways.

Think not, dear reader, that I have *the gift of faith*, that is, that gift of which we read in 1 Corinthians 12:9, and which is mentioned along with “the gifts of healing,” “the working of

miracles,”prophecy,” and that on that account I am able to trust in the Lord. *It is true* that the faith, which I am enabled to exercise, is altogether God's own gift; it is true that He alone supports it, and that He alone can increase it; it is true that, moment by moment, I depend upon Him for it, and that, if I were only one moment left to myself, my faith would utterly fail; but *it is not true* that my faith is that gift of faith which is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:9.³⁶

The reason he is so adamant about this is that his whole life—especially in the way he supported the orphans by faith and prayer without asking anyone but God for money—was consciously planned to encourage Christians that God could really be trusted to meet their needs. We will never understand George Mueller's passion for the orphan ministry if we don't see that the good of the orphans was second to this.

The three chief reasons for establishing an Orphan-House are: 1. That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the means, in its being seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him; and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened. 2. The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children. 3. Their temporal welfare.³⁷

And make no mistake about it: the order of those three goals is intentional. He makes that explicit over and over in his Narrative. *The orphan houses exist to display that God can be trusted and to encourage believers to take him at his word.* This was a deep sense of calling with Mueller. He said that God had given him the mercy in “being able to take God by His word and to rely upon it.”³⁸ He was grieved that “so many believers . . . were harassed and distressed in mind, or brought guilt on their consciences, on account of not trusting in the Lord.” This grace that he had to trust God's promises, and this grief that so many believers didn't trust his promises, shaped Mueller's entire life. This was his supreme passion: *to display with open proofs that God could be trusted with the practical affairs of life.* This was the higher aim of building the orphan houses and supporting them by asking God, not people, for money.

It seemed to me best done, by the establishing of an Orphan-House. It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was *the primary reason*, for establishing the Orphan-House. . . The *first and primary object* of the work was, (and still is) that God might be magnified by the fact, that the orphans under my care are provided, with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-laborers, whereby it may be seen, that God is FAITHFUL STILL, and HEARS PRAYER STILL.³⁹

That was the chief passion and unifying aim of Mueller's ministry: *live a life and lead a ministry in a way that proves God is real, God is trustworthy, God answers prayer.* He built orphanages the way he did to help Christians trust God. He says it over and over again.⁴⁰

Now we see why he is so adamant that his faith is *not* the gift of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9 that only some people have, but was the grace of faith that all Christians should have.⁴¹ Now we are ready to see this crucial distinction he made between the gift of faith and the grace of faith. His entire aim in life hung on this. If Christians simply said: “Mueller is in a class by himself. He has the gift of faith,” then we are all off the hook and he is no longer a prod and proof and inspiration for how we ought to live. Here is what he says

The difference between the *gift* and the *grace* of faith seems to me this. According to the *gift* of faith I am able to do a thing, or believe that a thing will come to pass, the not doing of which, or the not believing of which would not be sin; according to the *grace* of faith I am able to do a thing, or believe that a thing will come to pass, respecting which I have the word of God as the ground to rest upon, and, therefore, the not doing it, or the not believing it would be sin. For instance, the gift of faith would be needed, to believe that a sick person should be restored again though there is no human probability: for there is no promise to that effect; the grace of faith is needed to believe that the Lord will give me the necessities of life, if I first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness: for there is a promise to that effect. Matthew 6:33.⁴²

Mueller did not think he had any biblical ground for being certain that God would spare his wife Mary. He admits that a few times in his life he was given “something like the gift (not grace) of faith so that unconditionally I could ask and look for an answer,”⁴³ but he did not have that rare gift in Mary's case. And so he prayed for her healing conditionally—namely, if it would be good for them and for God's glory. But most deeply he prayed that they would be satisfied in God whatever he did. And God did answer that prayer by helping Mueller believe Psalm 84:11. No good thing will God withhold. God withheld no good thing from him, and he was satisfied with God's sovereign will. All this, he says, “springs from taking God at his word, believing what he says.”

How Did Mueller Get to this Position?

Let's go back and let him tell the story—essential parts of which are omitted from all the biographies I have looked at.

His father was an unbeliever and George grew up a liar and a thief, by his own testimony.⁴⁴ His mother died when he was 14, and he records no impact that this loss had on him except that while she was dying he was roving the streets with his friends “half intoxicated.”⁴⁵ He went on living a bawdy life, and then found himself in prison for stealing when he was 16 years old. His father paid to get him out, beat him, and took him to live in another town (Schoenbeck). Mueller used his academic skills to make money by tutoring in Latin, French, and mathematics. Finally his father sent him to the University of Halle to study divinity and prepare for the ministry because that would be a good living. Neither he nor George had any spiritual aspirations. Of the 900 divinity students in Halle, Mueller later estimated that maybe nine feared the Lord.⁴⁶

Then on a Saturday afternoon in the middle of November, 1825, when Mueller was 20 years old, he was invited to a Bible study and, by the grace of God, felt the desire to go. “It was to me as if I had found something after which I had been seeking all my life long. I immediately wished to go.”⁴⁷ “They read the Bible, sang, prayed, and read a printed sermon.”⁴⁸ To his amazement Mueller said, “The whole made a deep impression on me. I was happy; though, if I had been asked, why I was happy I could not have clearly explained it. “I have not the least doubt, that on that evening, [God] began a work of grace in me. . . . That evening was the turning point in my life.”⁴⁹

That's true. But there was another turning point four years later that the biographies do not open for the reader, but which for Mueller was absolutely decisive in shaping the way he viewed God and the way he did

ministry.

A Decisive Turning Point: Confidence in the Sovereign Goodness of God

He came to England in the hope of being a missionary with the London Missionary Society. Soon he found his theology and ministry convictions turning away from the LMS, until there was a break. In the meantime, a momentous encounter happened.

Mueller became sick (thank God for providential sickness!) and in the summer of 1829 he went for recovery to a town called Teignmouth. There in a little chapel called Ebenezer at least two crucial discoveries were made: the preciousness of reading and meditating on the word of God,⁵⁰ and the truth of the doctrines of grace.⁵¹ For ten days Mueller lived with a nameless man who change his life forever: “Through the instrumentality of this brother the Lord bestowed a great blessing upon me, for which I shall have cause to thank Him throughout eternity.”⁵²

Before this period I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption, and final persevering grace; so much so that, a few days after my arrival at Teignmouth, I called election a devilish doctrine. . . I knew nothing about the choice of God's people, and did not believe that the child of God, when once made so, was safe for ever. . . . But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the word of God.⁵³

He was led to embrace the doctrines of grace—the robust, mission-minded, soul-winning, orphan-loving Calvinism that marked William Carey, who died in 1834, and that would mark Charles Spurgeon, who was born in 1834.⁵⁴ About forty years later, in 1870, Mueller spoke to some young believers about the importance of what had happened to him at Teignmouth. He said that his preaching had been fruitless for four years from 1825 to 1829 in Germany, but then he came to England and was taught the doctrines of grace.

In the course of time I came to this country, and it pleased God then to show to me the doctrines of grace in a way in which I had not seen them before. At first I hated them, “If this were true I could do nothing at all in the conversion of sinners, as all would depend upon God and the working of His Spirit.” But when it pleased God to reveal these truths to me, and my heart was brought to such a state that I could say, “I am not only content simply to be a hammer, an axe, or a saw, in God's hands; but I shall count it an honor to be taken up and used by Him in any way; and if sinners are converted through my instrumentality, from my inmost soul I will give Him all the glory; the Lord gave me to see fruit; the Lord gave me to see fruit in abundance; sinners were converted by scores; and ever since God has used me in one way or other in His service.”⁵⁵

This discovery of the all-encompassing sovereignty of God became the foundation of Mueller's confidence in God to answer his prayers for money. He gave up his regular salary.⁵⁶ He refused to ask people directly for money.⁵⁷ He prayed and published his reports about the goodness of God and the answers to his prayer.⁵⁸ These yearly reports were circulated around the world, and they clearly had a huge effect in motivating people to give to the orphan work.⁵⁹ Mueller knew that God used means. In fact, he loved to

say, "Work with all your might; but trust not in the least in your work."⁶⁰ But he also insisted that his hope was in God alone, not his exertions and not the published reports. These means could not account for the remarkable answers that he received.

Mueller's faith that his prayers for money would be answered was rooted in the sovereignty of God. When faced with a crisis in having the means to pay a bill he would say, "*How the means are to come, I know not; but I know that God is almighty, that the hearts of all are in His hands, and that, if He pleaseth to influence persons, they will send help.*"⁶¹ That is the root of his confidence: *God is almighty, the hearts of all men are in his hands,*⁶² *and when God chooses to influence their hearts they will give.*

He had come to know and love this absolute sovereignty of God in the context of the doctrines of *grace*, and therefore he cherished it mainly as sovereign *goodness*.⁶³ This gave him a way to maintain a personal peace beyond human understanding in the midst of tremendous stress and occasional tragedy. "The Lord never lays more on us," he said, "in the way of chastisement, than our state of heart makes needful; so that whilst He smites with the one hand, He supports with the other."⁶⁴ In the face of painful circumstances he says, "I bow, I am satisfied with the will of my Heavenly Father, I seek by perfect submission to His holy will to glorify Him, I kiss continually the hand that has thus afflicted me."⁶⁵

And when he is about to lose a piece of property that he wants for the next orphan house, he says, "If the Lord were to take this piece of land from me, *it would be only for the purpose of giving me a still better one; for our Heavenly Father never takes any earthly thing from His children except He means to give them something better instead.*"⁶⁶ This is what I mean by confidence in God's sovereign goodness. This is the root of Mueller's faith and ministry.

The Aroma of Mueller's Calvinism: Satisfaction and Glad Self-Denial

But there was an aroma about Mueller's Calvinism that was different from many stereotypes. For him the sovereign goodness of God served, first and foremost, the satisfaction of the soul. And then the satisfied soul was freed to sacrifice and live a life of simplicity and risk and self-denial and love. But everything flowed from the soul that is first satisfied in the gracious, sovereign God. Mueller is clearer on this than anyone I have ever read. He is unashamed to sound almost childishly simple:

According to my judgement the most important point to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord. Other things may press upon you, the Lord's work may even have urgent claims upon your attention, but I deliberately repeat, it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God Himself! Day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. This has been my firm and settled condition for the last five and thirty years. For the first four years after my conversion I knew not its vast importance, but now after much experience I specially commend this point to the notice of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ: the secret of all true effectual service is joy in God, having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself.⁶⁷

Why is this “the most important thing”? Why is daily happiness in God “of supreme and paramount importance”? One answer he gives is that it glorifies God. After telling about one of his wife's illnesses when he almost lost her, he says, “I have . . . stated this case so fully, to show the deep importance to be satisfied with the will of God, not only for the sake of glorifying Him, but as the best way, in the end, of having given to us the desire of our hearts.”⁶⁸ Being satisfied in God is “of supreme and paramount importance” because it glorifies God. It shows that God is gloriously satisfying.

But there is another answer: namely, that happiness in God is the only source of durable and God-honoring self-denial and sacrifice and love. In reference to life-style changes and simplicity he says:

We should begin the thing in a right way, *i.e.* aim after the right state of heart; begin *inwardly* instead of *outwardly*. If otherwise, it will not last. We shall look back, or even get into a worse state than we were before. But oh! how different if joy in God leads us to any little act of self denial. How gladly do we do it then!⁶⁹

“Glad self-denial” is the aroma of Mueller's Calvinism. How can there be such a thing? He answers: “Self-denial is not so much an *impoverishment* as a *postponement*: we make a sacrifice of a present good for the sake of a future and greater good.”⁷⁰ Therefore, happiness in God is of “supreme importance” because it is the key to love that sacrifices and takes risks. “Whatever be done . . . in the way of giving up, or self-denial, or deadness to the world, should result from the joy we have in God.”⁷¹

A well-to-do woman visited him once to discuss a possible gift to the Institute. He did not ask her for the money. But when she was gone he asked God for it. And the way he did reveals his understanding of how the heart human works.

After she was gone, I asked the Lord, that He would be pleased to make this dear sister so happy in Himself and enable her so to realize her true riches and inheritance in the Lord Jesus, and the reality of her heavenly calling, that she might be constrained by the love of Christ, cheerfully to lay down this 500 [pounds] at His feet.⁷²

How Do We Get and Keep Our Happiness in God?

If happiness in God is “of supreme and paramount importance” because it is the spring of sacrificial love that honors God, then the crucial question becomes how do we get it and keep it?

But in what way shall we attain to this settled happiness of soul? How shall we learn to enjoy God? How obtain such an all-sufficient soul-satisfying portion in him as shall *enable us to let go the things of this world* as vain and worthless in comparison? I answer, This happiness is to be obtained through the study of the Holy Scriptures. God has therein revealed Himself unto us in the face of Jesus Christ.⁷³

Happiness in God comes from seeing God revealed to us in the face of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures. “In them . . . we become acquainted with the character of God. Our eyes are divinely opened to see what a lovely Being God is! And this good, gracious, loving, heavenly Father is ours, our portion for time and for eternity.”⁷⁴ Knowing God is the key to being happy in God.

The more we know of God, the happier we are. . . . When we became a little acquainted with God . . . our true happiness . . . commenced; and the more we become acquainted with him, the more truly happy we become. What will make us so exceedingly happy in heaven? It will be the fuller knowledge of God.⁷⁵

Therefore the most crucial means of fighting for joy in God is to immerse oneself in the Scriptures where we see God in Christ most clearly. When he was 71 years old, Mueller spoke to younger believers:

Now in brotherly love and affection I would give a few hints to my younger fellow-believers as to the way in which to keep up spiritual enjoyment. It is absolutely needful in order that happiness in the Lord may continue, that the Scriptures be regularly read. These are God's appointed means for the nourishment of the inner man. . . . Consider it, and ponder over it. . . . Especially we should read regularly through the Scriptures, consecutively, and not pick out here and there a chapter. If we do, we remain spiritual dwarfs. I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. But when I regularly read on through the whole with reference to my own heart and soul, I directly made progress. Then my peace and joy continued more and more. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more.⁷⁶

He was seventy-one and he would live and read on for another twenty-one years. But he never changed his strategy for satisfaction in God. When he was seventy-six he wrote the same thing he did when he was sixty, "I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord."⁷⁷ And the means stayed the same:

I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it. . . . What is the food of the inner man? Not *prayer*, but *the word of God*; and . . . not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.⁷⁸

Which brings us back now the satisfaction of Mueller's soul at the death of his wife, Mary. Remember, he said, "My heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says."⁷⁹

The aim of George Mueller's life was to glorify God by helping people take God at his word.⁸⁰ To that end he saturated his soul with the word of God. At one point he said that he reads the Bible five or ten times more than he reads any other books.⁸¹ His aim was to see God in Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead in order that he might maintain the happiness of his soul in God. By this deep satisfaction in God George Mueller was set free from the fears and lusts of the world. And in this freedom of love he chose a strategy of ministry and style of life that put the reality and trustworthiness and beauty of God on display. To use his own words, his life became a "visible proof to the unchangeable faithfulness of the Lord."⁸²

He was sustained in this extraordinary life by his deep convictions that God is sovereign over the human heart and can turn it where he wills in answer to prayer; and that God is sovereign over life and death; and that God is good in his sovereignty and withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly. He strengthened himself continually in his wife's final illness with the hymn:

Best of blessings he'll provide us
Nought but good shall e'er betide us,
Safe to glory He will guide us,
Oh how He loves!⁸³

An Exhortation and Plea from Mueller

I will let him have the closing word of exhortation and plea for us to join him in the path of radical, joyful faith:

My dear Christian reader, will you not try this way? Will you not know for yourself . . . the preciousness and the happiness of this way of casting all your cares and burdens and necessities upon God? This way is as open to you as to me. . . . Every one is invited and commanded to trust in the Lord, to trust in Him with all his heart, and to cast his burden upon Him, and to call upon Him in the day of trouble. Will you not do this, my dear brethren in Christ? I long that you may do so. I desire that you may taste the sweetness of that state of heart, in which, while surrounded by difficulties and necessities, you can yet be at peace, because you know that the living God, your Father in heaven, cares for you.⁸⁴

Timeline of George Mueller's Life

1805–1825	Birth to conversion
1825–1835	Conversion to entrance on his life work
1835–1875	His chief life's work
1875–1892	Time of his “missionary tours”
1892–1898	Close of his life

September 27, 1805	Born in Kroppenstaedt near Halberstadt, Prussia.
1819	Death of mother when he was 14
1821	Short imprisonment for theft at age 16
1827	Student at the University of Halle in divinity
November 1825	The Bible study that turned his life to Christ
August 27, 1826	First sermon

August–September 1826	Two months in A. H. Franke's Orphan House
June 13, 1828	Accepted provisionally by London Missionary Society
March 19, 1829	Arrived in London to study with LMS
August 1829	Stay in Teignmouth where he learned of the doctrines of grace
January, 1830	His connection with the LMS was dissolved
1830–1832	The stated preacher at Ebenezer Chapel, Teignmouth
1830	Baptized by immersion
October 7, 1830	Married to Mary Groves
October, 1830	Gave up salary at his church and for the rest of his life.
August 9, 1831	A stillborn child.
May, 1832	Left Teignmouth to take up ministry in Bristol
July 6, 1832	Began preaching at Bethesda Chapel with Henry Craik in Bristol
September 17, 1832	Daughter Lydia is born
February 20, 1834	Founded Scripture Knowledge Institute
March 19, 1834	Son Elijah born
June 26, 1835	Son Elijah died
November 28, 1836	First infant orphan house opened
June 13, 1838	Second stillborn child
October 7, 1838	His only brother died
March 30, 1840	Father died
January 22, 1866	Henry Craik died
February 6, 1870	Wife Mary died
November 16, 1871	James Wright (Mueller's eventual successor) married Mueller's daughter
November 30, 1871	Mueller himself married Susannah Grace Sangar
1890	death of daughter Lydia in her 58 th year
January 13, 1895	His second wife died. At 90 he conducts her service
March 10, 1898 (Thursday)	George Mueller died, having led prayer meeting night before
March 14, 1898 (Monday)	Mueller buried with his wives

A Note on Sources

I am not aware of any scholarly biography that puts Mueller in the context of his religious and social context with careful, documented attention to his own writings. A. T. Pierson's *George Mueller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith* (1889; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1999), was written by one who knew and admired Mueller and was endorsed by Mueller's son-in-law, James Wright. I think Pierson's assessment of Mueller's personality is perceptive, but neither here nor in the other popular biographies that I am aware of will the reader meet a deep and accurate portrayal of Mueller's doctrine which powerfully governed his life. Therefore, any serious study of Mueller will want to put most effort into the newly republished George Mueller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealing with George Muller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Muller Complete and Unabridged*, 2 vols. (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes Publications, 2003). A shorter access to Mueller's life and writings is also newly republished: George Mueller, *Autobiography of George Mueller, or A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer*, compiled by G. Fred Bergin (Denton, Tex.: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003).

¹ George Mueller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealing with George Muller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Muller Complete and Unabridged*, 2 vols. (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes, 2003), 1:646.

² *Ibid.*, 2:675.

³ Arthur T. Pierson, *George Mueller of Bristol and His Witness to A Prayer-Hearing God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1999), 248. Originally published as "Authorized Memoir" (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1899).

⁴ Pierson, *George Mueller*, 354.

⁵ Mueller, *Narrative*, 1:41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:39-40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:53.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:191

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:140.

¹⁰ Pierson, *George Mueller*, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹² Mueller, *Narrative*, 1:80.

¹³ “Are you in debt? Then make confession of sin respecting it. Sincerely confess to the Lord that you have sinned against Rom. xiii. 8. And if you are resolved no more to contract debt, whatever may be the result, and you are waiting on the Lord, and truly trust in Him, your present debts will soon be paid. Are you out of debt? then whatever your future want may be, be resolved, in the strength of Jesus, rather to suffer the greatest privation, whilst waiting upon God for help, than to use unscriptural means, such as borrowing, taking goods on credit, etc., to deliver yourselves. This way needs but to be tried, in order that its excellency may be enjoyed.” Mueller, *Narrative*, 1:251.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1:80-81.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2:365-375.

¹⁶ In his own words here is a summary of accomplishments up to May, 1868: “Above Sixteen Thousand Five Hundred children or grown up persons were taught in the various Schools, entirely supported by the Institution; more than Forty-Four Thousand and Five Hundred Copies of the Bible, and above Forty Thousand and Six Hundred New Testaments, and above Twenty Thousand other smaller portions of the Holy Scriptures, in various languages, were circulated from the formation of the Institution up to May 26, 1868; and about Thirty-one Millions of Tracts and Books, likewise in several languages, were circulated. There were, likewise, from the commencement, Missionaries assisted by the funds of the Institution, and of late years more than One Hundred and Twenty in number. On this Object alone Seventy six Thousand One Hundred and Thirty-seven Pounds were expended from the beginning, up to May 26, 1868. Also 2,412 Orphans were under our care, and five large houses, at an expense of above One Hundred and Ten Thousand Pounds were erected, for the accommodation of 2,050 Orphans. With regard to the spiritual results, eternity alone can unfold them; yet even in so far as we have already seen fruit, we have abundant cause for praise and thanksgiving.” Mueller, *Narrative*, 2:314.

¹⁷ Pierson, *George Mueller*, 274.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 305.

²⁰ George Mueller, *Autobiography of George Mueller, or A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer*, compiled by G. Fred Bergin (Denton, Tex.: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003), ix.

²¹ Pierson, *George Mueller*, 305.

²² Ibid., 257.

²³ Ibid., 283.

²⁴ Ibid., 285.

²⁵ Ibid., 285-286.

²⁶ Ibid., 286.

²⁷ Ibid., 287. By his own testimony he had read the Bible 100 times by the time he was 71. Mueller, *Narrative*, 2:834.

²⁸ One estimate is that Mueller collected about \$150 million in today's currency. Thanks to Coty Pinckney for the reference and calculations, using John J. McCusker, "Comparing the Purchasing Power of Money in Great Britain from 1264 to Any Other Year Including the Present," Economic History Services, 2001 (<http://www.eh.net/hmit/ppowerbp/>).

²⁹ "In looking back upon the Thirty One years, during which this Institution had been in operation, I had, as will be seen, by the Grace of God, kept to the original principles, on which, for His honour, it was established on March 5, 1834. For 1, during the whole of this time I had avoided going in debt; and never had a period been brought to a close, but I had some money in hand. Great as my trials of faith might have been, I never contracted debt; for I judged, that, if God's time was come for any enlargement, He would also give the means, and that, until He supplied them, I had quietly to wait His time, and not to act before His time was fully come. Mueller, *Narrative*, 2:291. On his view of debt, see also 1:25, 62, 83, 169, 172, 213, 251, 259, 316-317, 403.

³⁰ Mueller, *Narrative*, 2:389-401.

³¹ Pierson, *George Mueller*, 279.

³² Mueller, *Narrative*, 2:392-393.

³³ Ibid., 2:398.

³⁴ Ibid., 2:400.

³⁵ Ibid., 2:745. In the actual funeral sermon itself Mueller took as a text Psalm 119:68, "Thou art good and doest good." He opened it like this: "'The Lord is good, and doeth good,' all will be according to His own blessed character. Nothing but that, which is good, like Himself, can proceed from Him. If he pleases to take my dearest wife, it will be good, like Himself. What I have to do, as His child, is to be satisfied with what my Father does, that I may glorify Him. After this my soul not only aimed, but this, my soul, by God's grace, attained to. I was satisfied with God." Ibid., 2:398-399.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:302.

³⁷ Ibid., 1:103.

³⁸ Ibid., 1:105.

³⁹ Ibid. Italics added. The capital letters are his.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:131, 250, 285, 317, 443, 486, 548, 558, etc.

⁴¹ "All believers are called upon, in the simple confidence of faith, to cast all their burdens upon Him, to trust in him for every thing, and not only to make every thing a subject of prayer, but to expect answers to their petitions which they have asked according to His will, and in the name of the Lord Jesus." Ibid., 1:302.

⁴² Ibid., 1:65.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1:10.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 1:16.

47 Ibid., 1:17.

48 Ibid., 1:16.

49 Ibid., 1:17.

50 “For when it pleased the Lord in August, 1829, to bring me really to the Scriptures, my life and walk became *very* different.” Ibid., 1:28–29.

51 “Between July, 1829, and January, 1830, I had seen the leading truths connected with the second coming of our Lord Jesus; I had apprehended the all-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as our rule, and the Holy Spirit as our teacher; I had seen clearly the precious doctrines of the grace of God, about which I had been uninstructed for nearly four years after my conversion.” Ibid., 2:720.

52 Ibid., 1:39.

53 Ibid., 1:46. “Thus, I say, the electing love of God in Christ (when I have been able to *realize it*) has often been the means of producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin.” Ibid., 1:40.

54 “Being made willing to have no glory of my own in the conversion of sinners, but to consider myself merely as an instrument; and being made willing to receive what the Scriptures said; I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths. To my great astonishment I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines. As to the effect which my belief in these doctrines had on me, I am constrained to state, for God's glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means so dead to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might and as I ought to be, yet, by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period. My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before.” Ibid., 1:46. “Thus, I say, the electing love of God in Christ (when I have been able to *realize it*) has often been the means of producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin.” Ibid., 1:40.

55 Ibid., 1:752.

56 “Upon our first coming to Bristol we declined accepting anything in the shape of regular salary. . . . We did not act thus because we thought it wrong that those who were ministered unto in spiritual things should minister unto us in temporal things; but 1. because we would not have the liberality of the brethren to be a matter of constraint, but willingly.” Ibid., 1:275.

57 The gifts have been given to me “without one single individual having been asked by me for any thing. The reason why I have refrained altogether from soliciting any one for help is, that the hand of God evidently might be seen in the matter, that thus my fellow-believers might be encouraged more and more to trust in Him, and that also those who know not the Lord, may have a fresh proof that, indeed, it is not a vain thing to pray to God.” Ibid., 1:132.

⁵⁸ Mueller walked a narrow line: On the one hand, he wanted to give God all the credit for answering prayer for meeting all this needs, and so he did not ask people directly for help. But on the other hand he wanted this work of God to be known so that Christians would be encouraged to trust God for answered prayer. But in the very publication of the work of God he was making known how much he depended on the generosity of God's people, and thus motivating them by human means to give.

⁵⁹ “I do not mean to say that God does not use the Reports as instruments in procuring us means. They are written in order that I may thus give an account of my stewardship, but particularly, in order that, by these printed accounts of the work, the chief end of this Institution may be answered, which is to raise another public testimony to an unbelieving world, that in these last days the Living God is still the Living God, listening to the prayers of His children, and helping those who put their trust in Him; and in order that believers generally may be benefited and especially be encouraged to trust in God for everything they may need, and be stirred up to deal in greater simplicity with God respecting everything connected with their own particular position and circumstances; in short, that the children of God maybe brought to the practical use of the Holy Scriptures, as the word of the Living God. — But while these are the *primary* reasons for publishing these Reports, we doubt not that the Lord has again and again used them as instruments in leading persons to help us with their means.” Ibid., 1:662.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:611. “This is one of the great secrets in connexion with successful service for the Lord; to work as if everything depended upon our diligence, and yet not to rest in the least upon our *exertions*, but upon the blessing of the Lord.” Ibid., 2:290. “Speak also for the Lord, as if everything depended on your exertions; yet trust not in the least in your exertions, but in the Lord, who *alone* can cause your efforts to be made effectual.” Ibid., 2:279.

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:594.

⁶² “There is scarcely a country, from whence I have not received donations; yet all come unsolicited, often anonymously, and in by far the greater number of cases from entire strangers, who are led by God, in answer to our prayers, to help on this work which was commenced, and is carried on, only in dependence on the Living God, in whose hands are the hearts of all men.” Ibid., 2:387. “Our Heavenly Father has the hearts of all men at His disposal, and we give ourselves to prayer to Him, and He, in answer to *our* prayers, lays the necessities of this work on the hearts of his stewards.” Ibid., 2:498. “We should not trust in the Reports, and expect that they would bring in something, but trust in the Living God, who has the hearts of all in His hands, and to whom all the gold and silver belongs.” Ibid., 2:80.

⁶³ “Remember also, that God delights to bestow blessing, but, generally, as the result of earnest, believing prayer.” Ibid., 2:279.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:61.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2:401.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:505.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2:730-731. “I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a

happy state, and how *my* inner man might be nourished.” Ibid., 1:271.

68 Ibid., 2:406.

69 Ibid., 1:355.

70 Pierson, *George Mueller*, 374.

71 Mueller, *Narrative*, 1:355.

72 Ibid., 1:326.

73 Ibid., 2:731.

74 Ibid., 2:732.

75 Ibid., 2:740.

76 Ibid., 2:834.

77 Ibid., 1:271.

78 Ibid., 1:272-273.

79 Ibid., 2:745.

80 “I have not served a hard Master, and that is what I delight to show. For, to speak well of His name, that thus my beloved fellow-pilgrims, who may read this, may be encouraged to trust in Him, is the chief purpose of my writing.” Ibid., 1:63.

81 Ibid., 1:101.

82 Ibid., 1:105.

83 Ibid., 2:399.

84 Ibid., 1:521.